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## Burma

## Poultry and Products

## Avian Influenza

## 2005

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**Report Highlights:**

The Burmese business magazine BIG reported in the 14 March 2005 issue that Government officials were implementing "serious measures to prevent and eliminate" Avian Influenza (AI) from three border towns near Thailand. If accurate, this is the first report of the appearance of AI in Burma. Post is unable to independently confirm this report. The initial outbreak in the region of early 2004 hurt the Burmese poultry industry by drying up the supply of day-old chicks from Thailand. Burma produces about 63 million birds on an annualized basis, mostly smallholder production, with a few low-tech commercial operations.

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## Situation Overview

The Burmese business magazine BIG, dated 15 March 2005, reported that the Government of Burma was "taking serious measures to prevent and eliminate" Avian Influenza (AI) from Kawthoung, Myawaddy, and Tachileik, all towns with border crossings into Thailand. If accurate, this is the first public report indicating AI is present in Burma that has appeared since the regional outbreak beginning in early 2004. Post is unable to independently confirm this report. Until this report Burma has had no reports of AI in the internal press and Government of Burma (GOB) officials have declared Burma free of the disease. Burma appears to have been largely unaffected by the Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) epidemic that occurred in early 2004, even though neighboring countries were seriously affected.

Burma has a relatively small bird population with sparse density as compared to the neighboring countries, and actions taken by the GOB to seal its borders and ban poultry imports from HPAI-infected countries may have delayed HPAI's arrival in Burma.

Transmission of HPAI in other countries has been reported to occur most easily in concentrated bird populations, and migratory wild birds are increasingly being ruled out as a primary disease vector. As unlikely as it may seem, it is plausible to conclude that HPAI may have yet to appear in a widespread fashion in Burma. The towns mentioned in the BIG report are all border towns where most of the border trade between Burma and Thailand occurs.

Burma's poultry sector faced some serious consequences as a result of the regional 2004 HPAI outbreak. Burma's poultry sector faced shortages of day old chicks due to import bans, and poultry farmers encountered great difficulty in replenishing stocks of day old chicks (boilers/layers). Prices of imported day old chicks increased after the ban, but bird prices remained depressed in markets around the country. Even though recently poultry prices have strengthened in the domestic market, farmers have not been able to cover their costs due to the increased pricing for day old chicks. Unusually, the prices of the eggs in the market were not affected by the HPAI outbreak.

## Avian Flu Outbreak

In December 2003, news began to spread in Thailand about a possible AI epidemic occurring there, the eastern neighbor of Burma. At that time, the majority of the people in Burma were unaware of the outbreak in Thailand due to a weak domestic press, and no signs of a similar disease outbreak were to be seen in Burma. The usual causes of mass fatality among poultry in Burma at this time of year, the cold season, are Newcastle disease and Fowl Cholera. In January 2004, there were reports of a flock of crows dying in Moulmein, Mon State, from unknown causes. Rumors began to circulate that the crows were infected with avian flu from Thailand. After inspection by officials from the Livestock Breeding and Veterinary Department (LBVD), it was reported that the crows were actually poisoned. The next event rumored to be related to AI was a case of a human death in Madaya Township, in the central area of Burma. After inspection by GOB health authorities, it was reported that the cause of death was dengue hemorrhagic fever. As the news continued to spread about the outbreaks of AI in Thailand and also in Vietnam, with a number of people dying in each of these countries, the majority of people in Burma came to realize the serious threat avian flu posed to human health and began to refrain from consuming poultry meat.

## Demand Drops, and Burma Bans Imports

As the human death toll from HPAI climbed, demand for poultry meat began to fall in Burma to a level low enough so that poultry farmers could not cover the cost of production. Most Burmese prefer local poultry meat instead of commercially raised broiler meat, and

consequently, local poultry meat is much more expensive than that of broilers. Additionally, some people believed that local breeds of poultry are immune to AI, but, as the epidemic heightened in January, many people turned away from poultry meat and most poultry meat stalls in markets began to close down.

As the epidemic continued outside Burma, a senior government official stated in the Myanmar Times dated January 14-25 Volume 10, No: 200, 2004, that Burma was free from AI. Since Burma historically imported day old chicks (layers and broilers), eggs, breeders, and Parent Stock (PS) from Thailand, Malaysia and China, the GOB decided to ban all imports of poultry from AI infected countries such as Thailand, Malaysia, China, Vietnam, the Netherlands, and others. An additional precautionary measure taken by the GOB was to ban the import of end products of foods derived from poultry. This ban is still in place at the time of the report.

#### Additional Measures Taken

In January 2004, the head office of the LBVD, in collaboration with the respective local authorities, met with officials from the Border Trade Department and Customs Department to put in place a plan of action to implement a poultry import ban. The State- and Division-level LBVD offices were instructed to take preventive measures against an outbreak of AI. The LBVD officials were to closely watch and monitor the border towns close to Thailand, such as Myawaddy, Three Pagodas Pass, Kawthoung, Tacheliek, and Muse, a border town near China. The officials of the LBVD head office also met with regional Myanmar Livestock Breeding Organizations to provide educational information on preventive measures to take against the disease to the breeders. The LBVD officials paid special attention to the broiler and layer operations that are working on a commercial scale. (In Burma commercial scale means more than 1,000 birds per farm.) Poultry farms located in border areas were put on constant alert to signs of disease, as they could be among the first to be impacted. Border gates at Myawaddy, Three Pagodas Pass, Kawthoung, Tacheliek, and Muse allowed only trade in poultry that had recommendations from the Border Areas Laboratory on Control of Animal Disease working under the LBVD. Poultry shipments not in possession of health certificates in compliance with the standards set by the LBVD were reported to be automatically rejected by the border officials.

To further prevent AI, LBVD advised breeders to feed their flocks three native plants - *sesbania grandiflora*, *leucaena glauca* and *cymbopogon cetratus* - to increase their flocks' resistance to the virus. They were also told to be on constant vigil against the spread of the lethal disease.

The Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries, in cooperation with the Ministry of Health, formed avian flu inspections teams all over the country. Sources reported that the inspection committee checked about 9.4 million chickens at nearly 9,900 poultry farms across the country to identify any possible outbreaks of AI. None of the farms were reported to have experienced AI. Other measures include inspection of day-old chickens suppliers starting in February 2004. Additional measures taken by the GOB include the inspection of food service locations - hotels, restaurants, and barbeque shops, inspection of the health condition of restaurant personnel, and providing other necessary assistance in proper cooking and sanitary practices. 451 hotels, restaurants, and barbeque shops were inspected as of October 10, 2004.

With the objective of prevention of the spread of AI in Burma, the GOB held 137 workshops on AI, inviting wholesalers and farmers in all 14 States and Divisions to participate.

The office of the Director General of the LBVD issued notifications on the breeding of day old chicks and eggs, listing the following actions to be taken:

- (1) Scrutinization must be made on illegal imported chickens and breeding. If the imported chickens are infected with AI, these must be destroyed and buried in pits six feet in depth. Chicken farms that bred those illegal chickens must spray disinfectant systematically at their own cost;
- (2) Concerned authorities would inspect farms that are engaged in the illegal breeding of illegal chickens. They would close the incubators and destroy the illegal eggs completely and bury the destroyed chickens and eggs in six ft. deep pits;
- (3) The entrepreneurs involved in illegal poultry imports would be blacklisted and actions against them would be taken in line with the Health Animal Breeding and Development Law.

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization is providing assistance to the region to bolster the fight against the spread of AI and has included Burma in the programming. Two TCPs (Technical Cooperation Projects), one focused on laboratories and surveillance, another on transboundary disease information management, are being implemented. FAO provided laboratory test equipment to Burma and also funded the travel of GOB officials to the two OIE/FAO/WHO regional seminars on AI.

#### Some Birds and Eggs Get Through

The impact of the ban on poultry imports resulted in a 75% decline in the production of day-old chickens. The lack of domestic production led some producers to import in spite of GOB efforts to control the movement of poultry over the Burmese borders. Some 2,500-day-old chicks (broilers) were illegally imported from Ranong, Thailand on May 25, 2004, to Kawthaung, Myeik Township, Burma. The local LBVD sent those birds back to Ranong and the poultry farm was sprayed with formaldehyde disinfectant. It was also reported that another illegal importation of 4,000 eggs (broilers) over the Chinese border occurred on April 20, 2004. These birds went to Pyin Oo Lwin (Maymyo), a hill town in Mandalay Division and it is uncertain if the eggs were destroyed. Another shipment of 3,000 eggs (broiler) came in over the Chinese border June 6, 2004, and went to Madaya, also in Mandalay Division. These eggs were destroyed.

#### Burma's Poultry Industry

Trade sources indicate there are about 63 million broilers, layers, and local birds, with 50 million of these bred outdoors (free range) in rural areas. The size of the bird population in the commercial poultry farms (over 1,000 birds in traditional houses) ranges from 30,000 to 150,000 birds. Thetchaung Poultry Farm is the biggest farm in ShweNaung, Shan State, with a layer bird population of 150,000. The larger commercial broiler operations range in size from 30,000 to 40,000 birds, while layer operations range from 30,000 to 150,000 birds. The great majority of production is traditional in nature, with families raising a small number of birds nearby their homes. Poultry density in Burma as compared to flu-infected countries is sparse, with a low overall population.

#### Foreign Owned Poultry Farms

There are only two foreign owned private poultry farms in Burma, namely the CP Group from Thailand, and Jaffa from Indonesia. Previously, CP imported breeder eggs and Parent stock from Thailand to be multiplied in Burma for distribution of day old chicks into the domestic market. After the outbreak of avian flu, CP switched to importing boilers and layers from the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand. CP is estimated to have about 100,000 broiler

PS and 50,000 layer PS. The Indonesia operation Jaffa previously imported broiler and breeder eggs and PS from Indonesia, but after the ban on imports from AI-infected countries, Jaffa began to source breeder eggs and PS from India and France.

#### Imports Restarted

In May 2004, the GOB lifted a ban on poultry imports from Malaysia and India in response to pressures from producers. Import permits were issued for selected companies to import PS broilers from Malaysia and India, neither of which reported any cases of AI. In addition to these imports, the Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries also imported 1,400 of HTY GP (grand parent) chickens from France on 28 October 2004. The imported chickens are being bred as a "true line" in Zeebingyi village, outside Pyin Oo Lwin, Mandalay Division. This GP stock was imported to reproduce PS from a true line in order to supply the Rangoon market and to rebuild commercial stocks for future market supply. Random testing of day old chick imports is reported to be in place.

#### Impact On the Poultry Sector and Domestic Meat Market

Due to the impact of the import ban, there was a marked decline in broiler chicken breeding stocks. The shortage of breeders resulted in shortages of broilers and layers. To make matters worse, poultry farmers were selling their stocks to the market in a hurry early on to avoid losing their stocks to AI. It is estimated that the overall poultry population decreased about 30 percent as a result.

The outbreak of AI in the neighboring countries also affected the domestic meat market. Consumers in Burma were reluctant to eat poultry meat and the prices declined. During February 2004, chicken prices in the markets dropped by about 25 percent due to weaker consumer demand. A trader in the Central Poultry market in Mingalar Taung Nyunt Township, Rangoon Division, reported that broiler chickens were selling for kyat 900 school viss (3.6 lbs) in December but the price dropped in February to Kyat 650 per viss. Prices of other types of chicken (local breeds) also dropped. Poultry farmers estimated they were losing about kyat 200 a bird on average, including broilers and local birds, a serious loss. The AI impact came at a time of the year when there is an increased availability of other meats and fish, so consumers had other protein options.

#### Conclusion

Since last May 2004, as some imports were permitted, supplies have recovered somewhat. Demand for poultry meat in the domestic markets has recovered with the falloff in media attention over AI and chicken prices have stabilized again in Burma. Burma's poultry industry suffered heavy losses when AI was detected in the neighboring countries. Increased import prices for breeders resulted in a twofold price increase of day old chicks in the domestic market. But the additional cost to importers for testing of day old chicks for AI has increased the prices of day old chicks high enough that profit margins often do not cover costs. The industry remains beleaguered.

End of Report.